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Abdullah sends his message loud and clear across the country

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IT MAY have been unexciting, but it was a speech that was definite and specific in its task - to get the message across to Youth and Wanita delegates. And since it was shown live over RTM1, it was also a message sent to all party members across the country.

In a sober speech delivered without any dramatics when he declared open the Umno Youth and Wanita assemblies yesterday, vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took the delegates back to the year 1948.

It was also his way of establishing his credentials to the delegates, some of whom may not be aware of Abdullah's historical links. In measured tones, as if not wanting his audience to miss the significance of the history lesson, Abdullah related how in that year, Tun Hussein Onn, the father of acting Youth leader Datuk Hishammuddin and his father, Haji Ahmad Badawi, took part in an Umno Youth gathering at Padang BRC in Butterworth.

Today, some 51 years later it was the turn of Abdullah and Hishammuddin, both sons of former Youth leaders, to take centre stage. Coincidence or not, they both shoulder the same responsibilities their fathers did many decades ago.

Abdullah spoke of the honour bestowed upon him, a party vice-president, entrusted with the task of opening the joint assemblies. He has been asked by the party to carry out the task of the deputy president following the sacking last year of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Abdullah's speech was well-researched and covered a whole range of issues. It was not a policy speech in the traditional sense of the word as this would be covered by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he delivers his today.

But delegates were following the speech closely, many possibly giving their marks on delivery and substance in private. To many, Abdullah did not disappoint them.

Abdullah's message was simple and easily understood - don't sideline the young; "Umno-ise" them; understand the party struggle and contribute; understand today's international relations and power play; and most important of all, maintain and consolidate party unity.

There was no ambiguity in the points he raised; no doubts as to what he wanted to say; and no doubts about the message he wanted others to understand.

He also acknowledged the contributions of past leaders and veterans and immediately acknowledged the role of the Youth and Wanita wings. His reminder to Wanita members that it was the women who donated their jewellery to finance Umno's struggle for Independence was an indirect call for greater sacrifice.

Abdullah seems to suggest that Wanita's continued struggle is needed to ensure that the party remains in power. Sacrifices may not necessarily take the same form, but they are needed to win the forthcoming election.

Abdullah's reminder that delegates and members should be wary of those who were being used by foreigners to create disunity was also duly noted. There was, unlike previous openings, no loud declaration of support for the party president but Abdullah called on everyone to rally behind the Prime Minister as the party prepares for the forthcoming general election.

That Abdullah was not a showman was quite apparent. If at all there was any attempt by him for a bit of a "show", it came at the end of his speech

when he asked all delegates to join him in salutation to the party's tenets in its struggle.

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